CHAPTER

6

Writing Effective Sentences

Because the sentence is your main means of expressing ideas, look carefully at each sentence you write to make sure that it is clear, emphatic, and mature. Chapter 8 focuses on correct grammatical patterns; this chapter focuses on effectiveness, describing ways to express your thoughts with skill and style.

The principal types of sentences (see also **84**) are as follows:

1. Simple sentence (one subject and one predicate)

   I have never played tennis.

2. Compound sentence (two or more independent, or main, clauses)

   I have never played tennis, but I hope to start taking lessons next year. (independent clauses joined by coordinating conjunction)

3. Complex sentence (one independent clause and at least one dependent, or subordinate, clause)

   Although I have never played tennis, I hope to start taking lessons next year. (dependent clause + independent clause)

4. Compound-complex sentence (at least two independent clauses and one dependent clause)

   Although I have never played tennis, I hope to start taking lessons next year; I really need the aerobic exercise that tennis provides. (dependent clause + two independent clauses)

   Although I have never played tennis, I really need the exercise, so I hope to start taking lessons next year. (dependent clause + two independent clauses)

sub 20 Use subordination to relate secondary details to main ideas and to improve choppy sentences.

Two or more ideas can be connected in a sentence by two means: *coordination* and *subordination*. Coordination gives the ideas equal grammatical emphasis; subordination presents one as the main idea and puts the other(s) in a dependent or deemphasized relation to the main idea. Therefore, your sentence structure should depend upon the relationship you want to show between your ideas. Notice how the meaning subtly changes in the following sentences:

20

Two sentences: Comedians can make outrageous statements. They must make sure that no one takes these statements seriously.

Coordination: Comedians can make outrageous statements, but they must make sure that no one takes these statements seriously.

Subordination: Although comedians can make outrageous statements, they must make sure that no one takes these statements seriously.

Subordination: Comedians can make outrageous statements if they make sure that no one takes the statements seriously.

Subordination allows you to include a number of details in one sentence; some of these details you need but do not want to emphasize. In this sentence, the emphasis is in the main clause, with the subordinate *(italicized)* elements adding additional information:

> I started my car, *a white 2001 Buick with over 180,000 miles,* and drove to the lawyer's office, *which was not my favorite destination that summer.*

20a Use subordinate clauses to relate secondary details to your main idea.

Relative pronouns *(who, whom, which, that)* and subordinating conjunctions (such as *because, although,* and *since*—see others in the list below and the list on page 295) introduce subordinate clauses and signal specific relationships between them and the main clause. Notice in the following examples how each subordinate clause has a different relationship to the main clause:

Effective: Antonio, *who* had slept for ten hours, still felt tired.

Effective: *Although* Antonio had slept for ten hours, he still felt tired.

Effective: *After* he had slept for ten hours, Antonio still felt tired.

Effective: *Because* Antonio had slept for only ten hours after working a double shift, he still felt tired.

The following list of subordinating conjunctions shows the variety of relationships that subordination can indicate:

Cause: since, because, if, so that, in order that

Contrast or concession: although, though, whereas, while

Time: when, whenever, as, before, since, after, as long as, once, until, while

Place:	where, wherever
Condition:	if, unless, whether, provided that, as long as
Manner:	as, as though, as if, how
Similarity:	as . . . as

Some subordinate clauses can be used in the same way as nouns (as subjects or objects):

> Ms. Wallace argued *that command of a foreign language should be required for an advanced degree.* (clause as direct object of the verb *argued:* What did Wallace argue?)

Some subordinate clauses can also function as modifiers—that is, as adjectives or adverbs. An adjective clause modifies (or qualifies) a noun or pronoun and most often begins with a relative pronoun:

> Golf is a sport *that can reduce one to tears.* (The clause modifies *sport* and thus functions as an adjective.)

An adverb clause modifies a verb, adjective, adverb, verbal (such as a gerund or participle), or the rest of the sentence:

> *When Dr. Santiago speaks,* people listen. (The clause modifies the verb *listen*.)

Be sure to place your main idea, the one you want to stress, in the independent clause. When possible, put the main clause last:

> When you arrive at a fork in the road, take it. (Yogi Berra)

Do not misplace the emphasis in a sentence by putting the main idea in a subordinate clause:

Misplaced emphasis:	The American Medical Association issued a report which warned that many doctors tend to ignore nutrition.
Improved:	According to an American Medical Association report, many doctors tend to ignore nutrition.

20

20b Use subordination to improve long, rambling sentences.

Inexperienced writers often use long, stringy sentences composed of a series of main clauses hooked together with *and* or some other coordinating conjunction. If you subordinate one or more clauses, you will usually make your meaning clearer and the sentence more readable:

Ineffective: Some business leaders are unhappy with the skills of the average entry-level applicant, and they argue that schools should better prepare students for the workplace and that college standards need to be raised in general.

Effective: Business leaders who are unhappy with the skills of the average entry-level applicant argue that schools should better prepare students for the workplace and that schools should raise their overall standards.

Ineffective: Ms. Li is a hard worker, and she is a good teacher, and she pushes her students to excel.

Effective: Ms. Li, who is a hard worker and a good teacher, pushes her students to excel.

Effective: Ms. Li, who pushes her students to excel, is a hard worker and a good teacher.

Ineffective: I watched the start of the movie and had the strange sense that I had seen it before, and I wondered if, in my haste, I had bought a ticket for the wrong film.

Effective: When I watched the start of the movie, I had the strange sense that I had seen it before, as if I had hastily bought a ticket for the wrong film.

20c Use subordination to improve a series of short, choppy sentences.

Numerous short, choppy sentences are another common sign of an inexperienced writer. Such sentences are awkward to read and fail to show the relationships between their ideas. Notice in these examples how using subordination improves the short, choppy sentences:

Ineffective: Carl wanted a new truck very much. He took a second job. Then he went to his bank for a loan.

Effective: Carl wanted a new truck so much that he took a second job before he went to his bank for a loan.

Ineffective: Nick expected to enjoy reading *The Life of Pi.* He failed to understand it fully at first. Then he saw the movie.

Effective: Although he expected to enjoy reading *The Life of Pi,* Nick failed to understand it fully until he saw the movie.

20d Avoid excessive subordination.

Although using subordination is a valuable strategy, too many subordinate structures in a sentence can make it awkward, monotonous, or even confusing:

Ineffective: Ms. Rivera works in Tropical Business Center, the new office park near Portside Mall on the south side of the interstate.

Improved: Ms. Rivera works in Tropical Business Center, the new office park near Portside Mall; TBC is on the south side of the interstate.

Ineffective: I caught a grayling, which is a kind of small salmonid, which is found in Alaska and Canada.

Improved: I caught a grayling, the small salmonid found in Alaska and Canada.

In this last example, notice how you can eliminate nonessential information (and wordiness) by deleting *which is, which are,* and so on at the beginning of a clause.

Exercise

A. Read the following sentences. Mark *E* for those that are effective and *X* for those needing less or more subordination.

1. Feline leukemia is a deadly disease. It affects domestic cats. It is easily transmitted.
2. Exchange-traded funds (ETFs) have become a popular investment vehicle, and they are starting to replace individual stock purchases for investors and have a vast influence on the health of the stock market.
3. The realtor has bought a GIS system, which gives her an efficient way to pinpoint sites for new housing developments.
4. I did not finish my term paper, so I got an extension from my humanities instructor, so I'm off to the library.
5. The afternoon grew cold. Dusk was coming. Gloria sighed.
6. My friend Bobby is sick, and he could not accompany me to the races; I went with my friend Mario instead.
7. A national lottery has been debated for years, and its supporters believe that it would raise revenues and morale but that it would not cause problems for compulsive gamblers or open the door for organized crime.

8. At lunch I had a bacon cheeseburger, which is not real food but junk food, which is something that I'm trying to avoid.

9. Yuko specialized in the butterfly stroke, a style of swimming hard to master.

10. I find opera depressing. This is not because I have trouble following the story. It is because I have no appreciation for that style of singing.

B. Rewrite the sentences that you marked *X*.

co-ord
21 Use coordination when you want to give equal emphasis to two or more points.

You can use coordination to join two or more independent clauses and create one compound sentence that gives equal grammatical emphasis to each clause (see **83h**). A compound sentence is less choppy than two separate simple sentences that contain the same information. And compound sentences signal to the reader the similarity or equivalence of the material in the independent clauses.

Effective: I never forget a face, but in your case I'll make an exception. (Groucho Marx)

Effective: Jerry went to buy a camouflage outfit, but he couldn't find one.

Coordination implies an equal relationship between the clauses. If the content of one clause is more important than that of the other, subordinate the less important clause.

Ineffective: It was snowing, so we had to allow extra travel time.

Effective: Because it was snowing, we had to allow extra travel time.

comb
22 Use coordination to combine sentences.

Parallel coordinate phrases can help you develop mature, expressive sentences. Instead of constructing separate sentences, skillful writers often combine and relate sentence elements so that a single sentence carries more weight.

You can add colorful or clarifying details to a sentence by adding modifiers to the subject, to the predicate, or to the sentence as a whole. You can add modifiers in front of the main clause to form a periodic sentence

(see **23c**), or you can pile up modifiers after the main clause to avoid using a string of short, choppy sentences.

Ineffective: Computerized inventory systems have many uses. They allow businesses to monitor supplies. Businesses can also make efficient purchases from wholesalers. Shoplifting will be reduced. Employees will be less likely to steal.

Effective: Computerized inventory systems have many uses, allowing businesses to monitor supplies, to make efficient purchases from wholesalers, and to combat shoplifting and employee theft.

Effective: By allowing businesses to monitor supplies, to make efficient purchases from wholesalers, and to combat shoplifting and employee theft, computerized inventory systems have many uses.

The repetition in sentences that all begin alike can be eliminated by creatively combining them into one richer, more complex sentence. However, too many modifiers can overload a sentence and make it hard to read; also, not every sentence need be developed in this way. But combining can be especially valuable in generating effective descriptive and narrative sentences.

Ineffective: Steven stands on the bridge. He drops pieces of wood upstream. He times how long it takes them to come out the other side and calculates the rate of flow.

Effective: Steven stands on the bridge, dropping pieces of wood upstream, timing how long it takes them to come out the other side, calculating the rate of flow.

—Margaret Atwood

1. *Noun phrases* can develop a sentence by vividly restating a noun in the main clause:

   Nancy bought a 1963 Corvette Stingray, a beautiful car that is a true collector's item.

2. *Verbal phrases* can provide details of the action, object, or scene mentioned in the main clause. In a narrative sentence, verbal phrases enable a writer to picture simultaneously all the separate actions that make up the action. The following sentence is broken to distinguish the verbal phrases from the main clause that follows them:

   Working more than eighty hours per week,
   trying desperately to support her three small children,
   Terri somehow managed to stay ahead of the bill collectors.

22

3. *Absolute phrases,* like the indented phrases in the sentence below, can also add details to a single sentence, often by developing one aspect of the subject:

The waterfall loomed ahead,
its rocks forbidding,
its force tremendous,
and its sound deafening.

Note that the use of coordinate modifiers requires parallelism (see **28**).

Exercise

A. Develop each of the following into one sentence, using coordinate noun, verb, or absolute phrases.

1. The old man came to the door. His smile was kind. His voice was friendly.
2. The strip mall was abandoned. Its stores were boarded up. Its parking lot was covered with trash.
3. I once wanted to be a pirate. I saw myself standing in the wind on the bow of my ship. I dreamed of boarding the ships of the evil king's fleet and taking the plunder back to my island fortress.
4. Harry was seventeen when he got his first car. It was a fifteen-year-old sedan. Its doors would not lock. Its radio was broken.
5. My mother glared at the mess I had made. Her frown was severe. Her silence indicated that I was in real trouble this time.

B. Combine the following groups of sentences, using whatever method works best, to form effective sentences.

Ineffective: Jerry's room was a mess. The floor was littered with empty beer cans. The bed was piled high with dirty clothes. The desk was stacked with books.

Effective: Jerry's room was a mess, its floor littered with empty beer cans, its bed piled high with dirty clothes, and its desk stacked with books.

1. Some of the stranded travelers were quiet. They read or dozed in their seats. Others seemed angry. They talked about suing the airline.
2. The rain fell in sheets. It lashed the barn and the utility shed. The two buildings looked like the last survivors of some terrible weather war.
3. The movie took me to a place I had never been before. It was a place where technology was king. The people in the movie were the slaves of their machines.
4. Ann's cat is about five pounds above the average. It is a tortoiseshell. It is mostly black. Its eyes are very green.
5. My grandfather's feed store was very small. It was in a cinderblock building. The floor was made of hard pine. The walls were covered with manufacturers' advertisements.

emp 23

Vary word order and sentence length for emphasis.

Effective writing not only expresses ideas clearly and relates them to one another appropriately but also emphasizes the most important ideas. Skillful writers also vary the structure of their sentences to avoid relying on the same patterns.

23a Emphasize an important word by placing it at the beginning or end of the sentence.

The most emphatic position in most essays, paragraphs, or sentences is at the end. The next most emphatic position is the beginning; therefore, you can emphasize key words by starting and ending sentences with them. Because semicolons operate much like periods, words immediately before and after semicolons also receive emphasis. Notice how altering the key words in the following examples improves the emphasis:

Ineffective: All the villagers were killed, as Bob reported. (leaves the reader thinking about Bob, not about the tragedy)

Ineffective: It was Bob who reported that all the villagers were killed. (empty words at the beginning of sentence)

Effective: Bob reported that all the villagers were killed.

Ineffective: For us, time was brief and money was a problem.

Effective: We had little time; we had little money.

23

23b Use an occasional short sentence.

A very short sentence contrasting with longer sentences stops the flow and catches the reader's attention. You can also use a short sentence to emphasize an especially important point. Notice how effective the short sentences are in the following passages:

Effective: In the middle of a block of tasteful, quiet homes stood a two-story house with green paint and lavender trim, diamond-shaped windows, and gargoyles perched to strike. It was ghastly.

Effective: If we read of one man robbed, or murdered, or killed by accident, or one house burned, or one vessel wrecked, or one steamboat blown up, or one cow run over on the Western Railroad, or one mad dog killed, or one lot of grasshoppers in the winter, we never need read of another. One is enough.

—*Henry David Thoreau*

If you have written three or four long sentences, use a short one for variety. If you find that every sentence begins the same way, following the subject-verb-object pattern, for example, vary the word order and use subordination to express the relation among ideas.

Weak: People suffering from depression sometimes find it difficult to confront their problem. It is easier to let life slide by. But this medical condition will worsen if not treated. Depression requires prompt medical attention.

Improved: Although people suffering from depression sometimes find it difficult to confront their problem, preferring to let life slide by, this medical condition will worsen if not treated. Depression requires prompt medical attention.

23c Use an occasional balanced or periodic sentence.

Most English sentences are *loose* or *cumulative* sentences—that is, the main clause comes first, followed by details supporting the main idea. The order is reversed in a periodic sentence, in which the main idea follows the subordinate details. Because it saves the most important idea for last and because it is less commonly used, the periodic sentence is more emphatic. However, do not overuse the periodic sentence; save it for those ideas you especially want to emphasize.

Loose: *The family farm is becoming an endangered species,* criticized by agricultural economists as inefficient, scorned by banks as a poor credit risk, and threatened by huge multinational food producers.

Periodic: Criticized by agricultural economists as inefficient, scorned by banks as a poor credit risk, and threatened by huge multinational food producers, *the family farm is becoming an endangered species.*

In a *balanced* sentence, coordinate structures are enough alike that the reader notices the similarity. You can use a balanced sentence to emphasize a comparison or contrast. Notice how a repeated word points up the contrast between the two balanced parts of the sentence:

Balanced: Many of us resent shoddiness in cars, food, and services; few of us resent shoddiness in language.

Balanced: We used to admire a man's valor, his worth and bravery; today we admire a man's value, his material assets.

23d Use a climactic word order.

By arranging a series of ideas in order of importance, you can gradually build emphasis:

Climactic: Like all great leaders, Lincoln was hated by many; like all strong presidents, he was embattled by Congress; and, like many heroes, he was popular only after his death.

23e Write primarily in the active voice.

In most active-voice sentences, the subject does something:

Vanessa → started → the car.

In passive-voice sentences, the subject receives the action of the verb:

The car ← was started ← by Vanessa.

The active voice is usually more direct, natural, and economical:

Passive: Never put off until tomorrow what can be avoided altogether.

Active: Never put off until tomorrow what you can avoid altogether.

Passive: On May 7, a bill to establish permanent curfews for minors was introduced to the legislature by its sponsor, Representative Cooke. The issue at hand was discussed by legislators, and criticisms were offered by members from small towns and rural districts. It was suggested by Representative Blythe that the bill be sent back to committee. A vote on this motion was held, but a decision was not made because of an objection by Representative Cooke.

23

Active: On May 7, Representative Cooke, the sponsor of a bill to establish permanent curfews for minors, introduced the bill to the legislature. Legislators discussed the issue, and members from small towns and rural areas offered criticisms. Representative Blythe suggested that the bill be sent back to committee. The legislature voted on this motion but did not make a decision because of Representative Cooke's objection.

There are appropriate uses for the passive voice, as in these examples:

Passive: Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected to an unprecedented fourth term.

Passive: Jane Martin's article will be published next summer.

In each case, to rewrite the sentence in the active voice, the writer has to reconstruct the subject (and alter the original intention):

Active: American voters elected Franklin D. Roosevelt to an unprecedented fourth term.

Active: *Current Anthropology* will publish Jane Martin's article next summer.

If the writer is discussing Roosevelt or the article (or its author), not voters or *Current Anthropology,* the passive voice is more logical. But in general, writing in the active voice is better. Passive-voice sentences tend to be artificial, wordy, and dull. They are less emphatic, especially when they obscure the doer of the action:

A tax increase was announced yesterday.

Passive-voice sentences can also lead to dangling modifiers (see **25f**):

To be a CPA, a college education and a state exam are needed.

By doing a few simple blood tests, the cause of the patient's illness can be isolated.

Finally, the passive voice is not an effective way to vary your style. Unnecessary shifts in voice can be distracting for the reader (see **58a**).

Exercise

A. Study the following sentences. Mark *X* for those that need rephrasing for emphasis, *E* for those that are effective.

1. It was suggested by Professor Cho that the biology curriculum needs to be revised.

2. Although not everyone agrees about the afterlife, many people claim not to fear death.

3. One of the most important battles of the American Revolution was fought at Saratoga, an upstate New York village now known for its horseracing season.

4. For the experiment to be successful, detailed procedures must be followed.

5. Women students today constitute roughly half of college populations, a large increase since 1930, when men predominated.

6. One possible effect of global warming is the loss of beaches, and the extinction of certain animal species is another.

7. In the first half of the twentieth century, African Americans were prohibited from playing Major League Baseball, but this ban was lifted in 1949.

8. Gas mileage is usually not improved by fuel additives, which are available at all auto-parts stores.

9. Sam Snead was a great golfer, Jimmy Demaret was a good one, but Ben Hogan was outstanding.

10. Breathing large amounts of gasoline vapor may cause cancer, according to various studies.

B. Rephrase the sentences that you marked *X*.

awk 24 Avoid awkward repetitions and omitted words.

Awkward sentences are difficult to read. They may or may not be clear, but they always require extra effort and usually interrupt the flow of thought. In this section we discuss two common causes of awkwardness. But many awkward sentences do not fit into neat categories; they often result from the ineffective choice or arrangement of words, as described in this chapter and in Chapter 9. If awkwardness is a problem for you, try reading your sentences aloud: an awkward sentence usually does not sound right.

24a Repeat words only for emphasis or transition.

Repeating a prominent word or expression can provide an effective transition between sentences or paragraphs (see **18b**). Occasional repetition of a key word can also emphasize an idea. But use repetition sparingly, for too much can create awkward sentences:

Awkward repetition: A writer who writes about gender must be careful to be balanced.

Improved: A writer who concentrates on gender must be careful to be balanced.

Effective repetition: An external audit is valuable because it allows a company's managers to verify the firm's accounting procedures, to verify the firm's financial stability, and to verify the firm's perception by stockholders.

Effective repetition: Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* is a great novel as well as a great read.

One especially confusing type of repetition is the use of two different senses of the same word in the same or adjoining sentences. Find a synonym for one instance of the word.

Awkward repetition: No one knew the major reason for the major's sudden retirement.

Improved: No one knew the principal reason for the major's sudden retirement.

24b Include all necessary words.

Many sentences are awkward because they use unnecessary words, but many others are awkward or confusing because they omit words. Following are some of the more common types of omissions:

Awkward omission: I could see almost all the puppies were active and healthy. (*That* has been omitted after *see.* Omitting *that* in this case produces a confusing and awkward sentence.)

Improved: I could see that almost all the puppies were active and healthy.

Awkward omission: The children were happy and talking freely. (*Were* has been omitted before *talking. Happy* and *talking* are not parallel.)

Improved: The children were happy and were talking freely.

Awkward omission: In her will, Mrs. Johnson left money to Myra Rhodes, a neighbor; Charles Johnson, her nephew; and Paula J. Stephens, her granddaughter. (*To* is omitted before *Charles Johnson* and *Paula J. Stephens.* Repeating the preposition shows the parallel elements more clearly.)

Improved: In her will, Mrs. Johnson left money to Myra Rhodes, a neighbor; to Charles Johnson, her nephew; and to Paula J. Stephens, her granddaughter.

When you use two verbs that require different prepositions, be sure to include both prepositions:

Awkward omission: Richard could neither comply nor agree to the proposal. (*With* has been omitted after *comply*.)

Improved: Richard could neither comply with nor agree to the proposal.

Exercise

Mark *X* for sentences that are awkward and *E* for those that are effective. Rewrite the awkward sentences.

1. I felt my leg injury would keep me from training for the marathon.
2. Modern travelers frequently search and try to visit unspoiled destinations.
3. After the race, Lance was cold but talking a mile a minute.
4. Roxanne is less concerned about the future of the city than the past.
5. Dr. Hernandez is esteemed for her interest in her patients and her sense of them as individuals.

6. I found money is not essential for happiness.
7. The review board is willing to hear your demands and to comply with them, if at all possible.
8. The human rights team published a study that treated the plight of the refugees; the study focused on the refugees' treatment by the military at the border.
9. I advised my nephew to study, save his money, and to explore all available scholarship offers.
10. The governor could neither agree nor approve of the legislature's astounding proclamation.

mm dg 25 Place all modifiers so that they clearly modify the intended word.

The meaning of English sentences depends largely on word order. If you move words and expressions around, you will often change what a sentence means:

Nancy Ruiz recently published the poem she wrote.

Nancy Ruiz published the poem she wrote recently.

The rule of thumb is to place modifiers as near as possible to the words that they modify.

25a Place an adjective phrase or clause as near as possible to the noun or pronoun it modifies.

Single adjectives usually come immediately before the noun or pronoun they modify, adjective phrases and clauses immediately after. When other words come between an adjective and the word it modifies, the sentence may sound awkward, and its meaning may be obscured:

Misplaced: Vincent soaked an ankle he injured in an ice bucket.
Improved: Vincent used an ice bucket to soak an ankle he injured.

Often you have to do more than move the modifier; you have to revise the whole sentence:

Misplaced: Unless completely anesthetized, surgeons cannot operate on cardiac patients.
Revised: Surgeons cannot operate on cardiac patients who have not been completely anesthetized.

Misplaced: The ball grazed Jim's leg, which rolled into left field.
Revised: The ball, which rolled into left field, grazed Jim's leg.

25b Place a limiting adverb, such as *only* or *just,* immediately before the word it modifies.

In speech, most of us are casual about where we place adverbs such as *only, almost, hardly, just,* and *scarcely.* But writing should be more precise:

Misplaced: Tram almost completed all of her lab experiment.
Revised: Tram completed almost all of her lab experiment.

Notice how moving the modifier can change the meaning of a sentence:

I had five dollars only yesterday.

I only had five dollars yesterday. *(Think about what this sentence actually means and how the next one more accurately expresses the writer's intent.)*

I had only five dollars yesterday.

25c Make certain that each adverb phrase or clause modifies the word or words you intend it to modify.

An adverb phrase or clause can appear at the beginning of a sentence, inside the sentence, or at its end:

After the awards ceremony, Irina Clarke found two new friends.

Irina Clarke, after the awards ceremony, found two new friends.

Irina Clarke found two new friends after the awards ceremony.

However, be careful that the adverb modifies only what you intend it to modify:

Misplaced: A woman found dead behind a local bar was thought to be murdered by the city police.
Revised: According to the city police, a woman found dead behind a local bar was thought to be murdered.

Misplaced: On Tuesday, Michael swore that he was going to quit his job three times.
Improved: On Tuesday, Michael swore three times that he was going to quit his job.

25

25d Move ambiguous (squinting) modifiers.

If you find that you have placed a modifier so that it refers to more than one word, move it to avoid the ambiguity:

Ambiguous: The woman who was asked the question sincerely considered her response.

Clear: The woman who was asked the question considered her response sincerely.

Or: The woman who was asked the sincere question considered her response.

Ambiguous: The student whom Professor Walker answered abruptly left the room.

Revised: The student whom Professor Walker abruptly answered left the room.

Or: The student whom Professor Walker answered left the room abruptly.

25e Avoid awkwardly split infinitives.

Conventional usage avoids inserting an adverb between *to*—called the sign of the infinitive—and its verb form (for example, *to quickly run*). In some instances, splitting the infinitive is natural; many writers would prefer the following sentence to an alternative: "To suddenly stop accepting discount coupons might upset our customers." But the following example is awkward:

Awkward: The veterinarian proposed to, if Ms. Jones agreed, postpone the dog's surgery until August.

Revised: The veterinarian proposed to postpone the dog's surgery until August, if Ms. Jones agreed.

25f Make certain that introductory verbal phrases relate clearly to the subject of the sentence.

Modifiers are said to *dangle* when they do not logically modify a word or expression in the sentence. Most often, a *dangling modifier* does not correctly refer to the subject of the sentence:

Dangling: Driving to the old house, my left ear started to hurt.

In this sentence, the reader will mistakenly assume that the subject of the sentence *(ear)* is also the understood subject of the verbal *(driving)*. The result is absurd: Did the ear drive? The writer should have written the following:

Improved: While *I* was driving to the old house, my left ear started to hurt.

The improved sentence illustrates one way of correcting a dangling modifier: supply the necessary words to make the phrase into a complete dependent clause. It is relatively easy to supply missing words when the dangling modifier is an *elliptical phrase* (a predicate with the subject and part of the verb implied but not expressed):

Dangling: While watching the movie, their car was stolen.
Corrected: While *they* were watching the movie, their car was stolen.

At other times, the best way to correct a dangling modifier may be to revise the independent clause, as in the following examples:

Dangling: *Driving recklessly,* Allen's Miata crashed into a city bus. (dangling participial phrase)
Corrected: Driving recklessly, Allen crashed his Miata into a city bus.

Dangling: *To succeed in show business,* a great deal of hard work and luck are needed. (dangling infinitive)
Corrected: To succeed in show business, one needs a great deal of hard work and luck.

These examples illustrate two common causes of dangling modifiers. In the first sentence, the word that the phrase is intended to modify is not the subject of the sentence but a possessive modifying the subject *(Allen's).* In the second sentence, the independent clause is in the passive voice (see **23e**). Note that the revisions are both logical and more direct.

Some verbal phrases (called *absolute constructions*) refer not to a single word but to the whole idea of a sentence; hence, they do not dangle.

Acceptable: *Generally speaking,* most families have problems.
Acceptable: *Considering the cost of gasoline,* the bus fare looks quite reasonable.

25g Be certain that concluding clauses and phrases modify the word intended.

Illogical: Tom Hanks won an Oscar for *Forrest Gump,* his greatest role. (Was the movie his role?)
Corrected: Tom Hanks won an Oscar for his greatest role, Forrest Gump, in the movie of the same name.

26

Exercise

Rewrite the following sentences, correcting any dangling or misplaced modifiers.

1. Without money or prospects, Jonathan's future was dim.
2. While swimming in the mist of happy memories, my finger started to twitch.
3. She is only happy when she establishes a clear schedule for a project.
4. Jeremy nearly finished the race in 23 seconds, a school record.
5. Be it stupid or sublime, a reader should be able to experience a story's conclusion without having to wait for the next issue of the magazine.
6. I considered what Mr. Perkins had told me carefully.
7. To succeed at golf, a good grip is required.
8. Peering into the future, trouble was expected.
9. Yesterday, Roberta only worked three hours.
10. Considering all the time and expense that went into decorating the Christmas tree, the results are disappointing.

pred
26

Make subject and predicate relate logically to each other.

As a main verb, *be* links a subject with a complement: "The *piano is* an old *Steinway.* The *news is good.*" A common error called *faulty predication* occurs when the subject and complement cannot be logically joined:

Faulty: His job was a reporter for the *Sun Times.*

Correct: He worked as a reporter for the *Sun Times.*
(he = reporter)

Faulty: The art competition is a chance to prove what a painter can do.

Correct: The art competition provides a chance to prove what a painter can do.

Or: The art competition is an event that proves what a painter can do. (art competition = event)

In general, avoid following a form of *be* with adverb clauses beginning with *where, when,* and *because:*

Faulty: Someone said that diplomacy is when one lies gracefully for his country.

Correct: Someone said that diplomacy is lying gracefully for one's country.

Faulty: The reason I got a new smartphone was because my old one was stolen.

Correct: The reason I got a new smartphone was that my old one was stolen.

Or: I got a new smartphone because my old one was stolen.

Faulty predication can occur with verbs other than *be* whenever the subject and predicate do not fit together logically:

Faulty: Neglected children must be dealt with severely.

Correct: Child neglect must be dealt with severely.

Exercise

A. Mark *E* for those sentences in which the subject and complement are compatible, *X* for those with faulty predication.

1. A malfunctioning computer is a ghastly experience for a writer working on deadline.
2. London, England, is where the 2012 Summer Olympics were held.
3. The city was a mob of athletes, media figures, and spectators.
4. September was when the city got back to normal.
5. Justin's new executive position is much better compensated than was his old one.
6. Exceeding the posted speed limit is the most common criminal violation in the United States.
7. The reason is because motorists believe these restrictions to be absurd.
8. Actual battle conditions are when the military can evaluate a soldier's ability.
9. However, virtual reality offers one way to test a soldier prior to military conflict.
10. A good detective novel is an evening well spent.

B. Reword the sentences that you marked *X*.

27

comp 27

Compare only things that are logically comparable.

A common fault involves comparing a characteristic of one thing with another thing instead of with its corresponding characteristic:

Faulty: Disney's theme parks are visited by more people than any other company. (comparing *parks* to *company*)

Correct: Disney's theme parks are visited by more people than *those of* any other company.

Faulty: A technician's income is generally lower than a scientist. (*income* compared to *scientist*)

Correct: A technician's income is generally lower than a scientist's.

Or: A technician's income is generally lower than *that of* a scientist.

Many comparisons are faulty because the word *other* has been omitted:

Faulty: Miranda is smarter than any child in her class.

Correct: Miranda is smarter than any *other* child in her class.

Many faulty comparisons are ambiguous:

Faulty: Tim likes Amy much more than George. (Who likes whom?)

Correct: Tim likes Amy much more than George does.

Or: Tim likes Amy much more than he likes George.

Faulty: Pensacola is farther from Chicago than Miami.

Correct: Pensacola is farther from Chicago than it is from Miami.

Many comparisons are incomplete because words such as *that* and *as* are omitted.

Faulty: Reggae is as good if not better than other types of popular music.

Correct: Reggae is as good as, if not better than, other types of popular music.

Or: Reggae is as good as other types of popular music, if not better.

Faulty: The poetic style of Vaughan is much like Traherne.

Correct: The poetic style of Vaughan is much like that of Traherne.
Or: . . . is much like Traherne's.

Exercise

A. Mark *E* for those sentences with effective comparisons and *X* for those with ineffective comparisons.

1. On one dismal Saturday, my golf score was higher than any golfer's in the tournament.
2. Bobby loves pork chops more than his wife.
3. Plagiarism is as serious if not more so than any other problem involving academic integrity.
4. Technically, failure to yield the right-of-way causes more accidents than speeding does.
5. Cats have an easier life than any animal on the planet.
6. The baseball cap is more common in the United States than any other type of hat.
7. The swimmer's graceful stroke was like a swan.
8. Ed could never tell Karen's voice from Anne.
9. The traffic flow is better this summer than it has been for years.
10. I am much colder than yesterday.

B. Reword the sentences that you marked *X*.

comp

28 Use parallel structures effectively.

When you express two or more ideas that are equal in emphasis, use parallel grammatical structures: nouns with nouns, infinitives with infinitives, adverb clauses with adverb clauses. Parallel structures clearly and emphatically indicate parallel ideas.

Effective: The old man was haunted by his past, tortured by his failures, confused by his successes, and terrified by his future. (verb phrases)

28

Effective: It is better, Hippocrates said, for a doctor to do nothing than to do harm to the patient. (infinitive phrases)

Effective: Because of its acute hearing, because of its playful imagination, and most of all because of its amazing intelligence, the porpoise is a rare creature of the sea. (introductory phrases)

28a In parallel structures, use equal grammatical constructions.

A common error among inexperienced writers is faulty parallelism—treating unlike grammatical structures as if they were parallel. This practice upsets the balance that the reader expects in a coordinate structure. Below are some of the more common types of faulty parallelism:

Faulty: Albert has two great ambitions: running a business and to become a millionaire.

Correct: Albert has two great ambitions: running a business and becoming a millionaire.

Or: . . . to run a business and to become a millionaire.

Faulty: Andrea is intelligent, charming, and knows how to dress.

Correct: Andrea is intelligent, charming, and well dressed.

28b Repeat necessary words to make parallels clear to the reader.

Awkward, confusing sentences often result if you do not repeat needed prepositions, signs of infinitives (*to*), auxiliary verbs, or other words needed to make a parallel clear:

Faulty: North Carolina is well-known for its beautiful mountains, found in the western region of the state, and its beaches, rivers, and farms.

Correct: North Carolina is well-known for its beautiful mountains, found in the western region of the state, and *for* its beaches, rivers, and farms.

Faulty: I told my daughter that she should be more realistic and driving two more miles to work would not be a huge problem.

Correct: I told my daughter that she should be more realistic and *that* driving two more miles to work would not be a huge problem.

28c Always use parallel structures with correlative conjunctions such as *both . . . and* or *neither . . . nor.*

Correlative conjunctions can join two closely related ideas, but both ideas should be in the same grammatical form. The most common correlatives are *both . . . and, either . . . or, not only . . . but also, neither . . . nor, whether . . . or.*

Faulty: Jack Nicklaus is well respected both for his outstanding career in golf and as a shrewd businessperson.

Correct: Jack Nicklaus is well respected both for his outstanding career in golf and for his shrewd business sense.

Faulty: He is admired not only by those who recognize his amazing athletic skills, but also financial analysts applaud his business career.

Correct: He is admired not only by those who recognize his athletic skills but also by financial analysts, who applaud his business career.

Exercise

A. Mark with *E* those sentences that are effective and with *X* those containing faulty parallelism.

1. I have three desires: to succeed in business, to marry, and have children.
2. To follow the letter of the law is not the same as following the spirit of the law.
3. "Son, you need to decide whether to fish or to cut bait," said my father.
4. Driving into the sun can lead to fatigue, headaches, and is irritating.
5. The summer camp for children is safe, convenient, and to the benefit of working mothers.
6. Most people enjoy having a meal cooked for them, their food served, and someone to clean up the aftermath.
7. In my first year with the company, I received many financial bonuses and several new clients for the firm.

28

8. The students on this campus should be opposed to and protest this blatant disregard for their freedoms.
9. Ellen wants to be a teacher and develop her skills as a consultant.
10. The new car that I want is beautiful, fast, but costs an arm and a leg.

B. Reword the sentences that you marked *X*.